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COMMUNICATIONS PLAN REGARDING ASBESTOS

Board of Education for the City of Hamilton

December 13, 1989

Communications Plan

Regarding Asbestos

1. **Develop an Information Package through discussion with our Principals. It will fill three purposes. Principals will:**
   a) use the package to provide staff with detailed information so that student concerns will be alleviated through meaningful classroom discussion.
   b) provide detailed information to student council and other student leaders.
   c) use this package as a source of information to prepare a school-to-parent newsletter by January 12, 1990.

2. **Distribute the package to executive members of the news media** — Hamilton Spectator's Editorial Board; Brabant Newspapers; New Hamilton Weekly; Hamilton This Month. Also to Directors of News Departments — CHML; CKDS; CKOC; CKLH; CHAM; CBC; CHCH TV; Cable 14.

3. **Request that as many Trustees as possible be present to lend their support during the planning with Principals and other information-sharing opportunities.**

4. **Distribute information widely throughout the community— Public Libraries, City, Region, MPP's, Home and School, etc.**

5. **Invite the continued co-operation and support of the Teacher Federations to form an important part of this communications plan.**

6. **Invite the co-operation of C.U.P.E. 1344 in this communications challenge.**

   Note: C.U.P.E. has agreed to meet with a small group of student representatives and officials.

7. **Request the continued support of our School Health and Safety Representatives**

8. **Continue to operate the Asbestos Information Hotline within the Information Services Department (521-2508)**

9. **If a serious asbestos concern arises at your school, please ensure that the following steps are taken immediately:**
   a) Contact Bill Ferris at 527-5092. He will quickly put into place the appropriate resources to deal with the matter.
   b) Inform your Superintendent who will contact your Trustees.

Information Package

Instructions for Principals

1. This information package is for use by Principals as a basis for discussion with staff, and
2. For use as a source of information for writing a school-to-parent newsletter.*

* *A communications expert has agreed that a centrally produced newsletter would not be appropriate. Your newsletter should begin with a personal observation about the asbestos problem. Provide specific information about the situation at your school—How much asbestos exists in your school? What repair work has been done? Provide reassurance about the safety of all who occupy your school...*

In order to gather details, please see the

Sources of Information

(Attachment #1) It provides research leads and the names of two contact people in our Plant Department

Raw Material for Newsletter

(Attachment #2) provides some content suggestions for rounding out the body of your newsletter.

Within your newsletter, please make reference to the following attachments and append them to your newsletter.

Overview--Asbestos in Schools and Asbestos Corrective Work in Progress

(Attachment #3), and

The Relative Health Hazards of Asbestos

(Attachment #4)

Attachment #1

Sources of Information

Resources available to assist Principals in gathering detailed information.

1. **Preliminary Asbestos Inventory**

   Check the WHMIS Binder in your school.

2. **Detailed Inventory**

   Detailed asbestos inventories on all schools are now being compiled by our Consultants. Information is complete for approximately 15 schools. **Sharon Fair**, Asbestos Field Supervisor 527-5092 extension 476 and **Jim Riley**, Technical Supervisor 527-5092 extension 245, both of our Plant Department, will do their very best to provide you with as much information as possible. In secondary schools, your Foreman is another good source of information.

3. **Asbestos Corrective Work**

   What has been done in your school? Compilation of the work at all schools in now taking place and will be completed within two weeks. Our Plant Department will provide as much information as possible immediatley by digging back through work orders. Please call 527-5092 extension 476.

   Please understand that Sharon and Jim will do their very best to assist you during the coming days while they will continue to be bombarded with other serious demands on their time.

4. **Asbestos Information Hotline (521-2508)**

   Through the Hotline, **Norm Forster** will continue to assist with information, helping Principals to respond to parents' questions.

Attachment #2

Raw Material for Newsletters

Introductory portion to be written by Principal as per INFORMATION PACKAGE Instructions. .

You may wish to use some of the following , In any order you deem appropriate, to flesh out the body of your newsletter:

Unfortunately, many students have been unduly alarmed during the past few weeks as a result of asbestos-related demonstrations...

In one newspaper article, for example, the following irresponsible comment was quoted: "If parents knew what I know, their kids wouldn't be here today."

The fact is if all students and parents knew the whole truth about the Hamilton Board's asbestos problem, their fears would disappear.

Having asbestos in a building does not necessarily make it unsafe to occupy. If asbestos is in a sealed (encapsulated) state, it is very safe for everyone occupying the building. The asbestos in Hamilton schools ranges from being well encapsulated to cases where breakdown from time to time as a result of roof leaks, accidental bumping etc. is occurring. In the majority of schools, our approach has been to maintain the asbestos in a safe state of repair through regularly monitoring and continuing to do immediate repair work wherever necessary. In a few cases, where the asbestos is in a general state of poor repair, complete removal of the asbestos during the summer holiday periods may be the route to go.

Briefly describe the volume of asbestos corrective work done in Hamilton schools this year and make reference to the OVERVIEW Attachment. . .

Regarding asbestos in _____ School, I have investigated and found. . . *(Refer to Attachment #1 for help with this portion of your newsletter). . . .*

We have in the office, a Preliminary Inventory of Asbestos. It indicates. . .

At this time, a more Detailed Inventory is being completed for every school building in our school system. This is being completed by two highly specialized asbestos consulting firms. Blueprints are being studied. The location and condition of all asbestos -- behind walls, above ceilings etc. -- are being documented for all six million square feet of space within our schools. This inventory will be complete within the next few months and will be used as the basis for determining the full extent of corrective work which should be undertaken safely and without wasting a lot of taxpayer money. . .

asbestos

Six asbestos contracting firms have carried out nearly $2 millions worth of corrective work since last spring. The Board has approved in principle, a plan at an estimated cost of $7.6 million, to be completed between now and 1994. A more precise plan will be put into place when the Detailed Inventories have been completed for all schools. The final cost could be considerably higher.

Make reference to the RELATIVE HEALTH HAZARDS OF ASBESTOS Attachment. . .

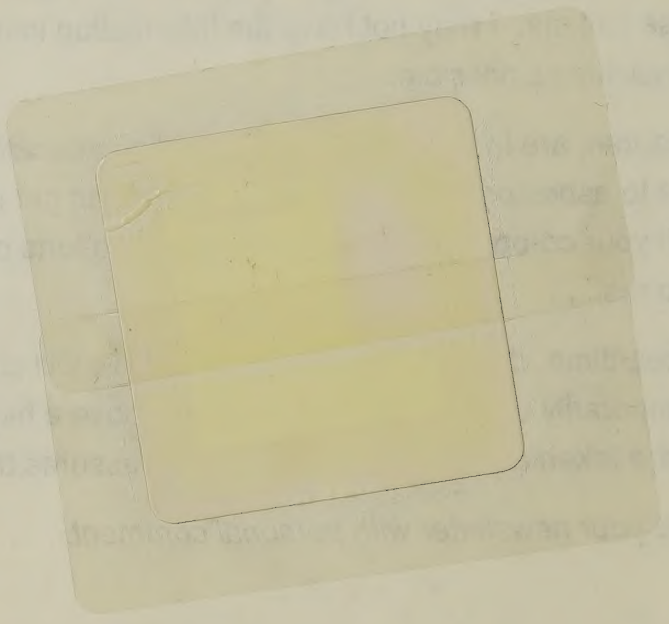
All staff in our school system have now had asbestos-awareness training. As a result, schools are being monitored regularly by staff. Inspections by asbestos consultants take place whenever concerns arise. Asbestos repair work is being carried out as quickly as possible.

As more details become available, I'll send them to you. For answers to questions you may still have, please call me. I may not have the information immediately, but I'll work hard to get answers for you as quickly as possible.

We, of course, are in the business of providing education. It has now become important that we devote time to asbestos concerns if they continue to get in the way of learning for students. Together, with your co-operation and the dedicated efforts of our Board of Education, we will put all concerns to rest. . .

In the meantime, daily inspections in all schools will continue. Any area in any school which may become temporarily unsafe and could possibly pose a health hazard will be closed until corrective measures are taken and the Ministry of Labour assures the Board that it is safe to re-occupy. . .

Conclude your newsletter with personal comment. . . .



Attachment #3

Overview—Asbestos in Schools and Asbestos Corrective Work in Progress

In most public buildings built prior to 1978, asbestos was used as a fire retardant applied to structural steel beams underneath roof systems and as a mechanical system insulation (boilers, steam lines, etc.). Between 1974 and 1979, the use of asbestos in new construction was limited, as the hazards associated with the product became more widely known.

In 1979, the province provided Ontario School Boards with a $26 million grant to encapsulate, repair or remove asbestos materials. The Hamilton Board of Education chose to encapsulate asbestos-containing materials within our schools. A number of school facilities had remedial action taken at that time.

In 1984, in response to public concern, the government established a royal commission to investigate asbestos use in public buildings and whether or not its use jeopardized the health and safety of the occupants. The commission found that asbestos in the form of chrysotile and amosite had been widely used in a large number of multi-story buildings including offices, schools, factories and air terminals. It determined that asbestos is a potentially serious hazard to workers who are directly engaged in such construction-related activities as asbestos removal and building demolition, or who are involved in a variety of building maintenance activities.

The second finding was that "the inhalation of chrysotile and amosite fibres by building occupants almost never poses a health hazard except if particularly elevated exposure is caused by the disturbance of asbestos, especially during removal projects."

More importantly, they concluded that "the air in buildings with sprayed-on asbestos-containing insulation usually averages less than the equivalent of an optical fibre count of .001 fibres per cubic centimeter of air, and that the highest readings would rarely exceed .01 fibres per cubic centimeter of air." They noted that the environmental guideline for outside air is .04 fibres per cubic centimetre of air. They also noted that "we are all exposed to asbestos because it is in the water we drink and the air we breathe. Counts of up to 4 million fibres per litre of drinking water have been found in southern Ontario."

Asbestos is generally present in outside air and levels have been detected on busy highways where vehicle braking action, as expected, releases fibres.

The Commission noted that "numerous Ontario School Boards have made massive efforts to remove asbestos from schools in direct response to parental apprehension concerning the health of their children. The health risk to students remains insignificant because the level of exposure in the asbestos-containing schools has, in general, been so low."

"The exceptions are found in those instances where loose asbestos is being actively disturbed or is falling from ceilings. With these exceptions, the program for removing asbestos from all asbestos-containing schools was not justified by the health risk posed to students. Neither the scale nor the pace of the asbestos removal were warranted. If anything, the scale and pace of the program significantly increased the risk to some workers directly engaged in asbestos control projects. 'Crash' programs invariably mean that

inexperienced contractors and personnel will enter the field."

The Commission went further to provide a set of recommendations for the undertaking of asbestos repair and removal. These recommendations developed into the Regulation Respecting Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Building Repair Operations which was passed in 1986. The regulation outlined specific procedures to be followed during repair or removal of asbestos. The Hamilton Board of Education believed they were in compliance with this regulation as they hired outside asbestos contractors for all asbestos renovation work.

In 1988, during the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System training of custodial staff, some concerns were expressed regarding the activities of asbestos contractors while conducting work in our facilities. The Safety Department prepared to respond to these concerns.

The Plant Department embarked on the inventory process which is still underway. Progress is slow as it is necessary to review blueprints, tour facilities room by room, take samples and have the samples analyzed for percentages and specific types of asbestos. When the work is completed, drawings must be made identifying locations of asbestos. According to our schedule, it will take several months to complete an inventory of all school facilities.

Meanwhile, the Plant Department has developed a procedure which recommends that any breakdown in encapsulation is to be reported immediately. If exposed asbestos is detected during school hours, it is to be reported to the Principal or Administrative Assistant--after school hours to the Caretaker. The Principal/Caretaker will review the files of the specific facility. If identity of the substance is in question, they will contact Jim Riley, Plant Department, at ext. 245.

Exposed asbestos--identified or suspected--is to be isolated until repair can be completed. Steps are to be taken to ensure that material remains undisturbed until it can be identified and properly repaired.

Concerns have been expressed regarding asbestos warning signs. In June 1989, a system was put into place whereby signs are posted in areas where asbestos is located and wherever staff will be doing repairs. This is a preventative measure to ensure that staff do not unwittingly cut into asbestos materials. Signs are also used to isolate areas where asbestos repairs are underway. The signs are not removed until the areas are thoroughly inspected and approved for occupancy.

In order to coordinate asbestos repairs and provide better information, a major Asbestos Response Team is now being developed, subject to Board approval. It will comprise a steering group consisting of the Director of Education and Senior Management. A special team will serve as the contact point and schedule all asbestos repair work. Three special Asbestos Field Units will do the work.

Attachment #4

The Relative Health Hazards of Asbestos

The relative health hazards posed by asbestos are set out in a document, The Report of the 1984 Royal Commission on Matters of Health and Safety Arising from the Use of Asbestos in Ontario.* CA2 ONZ 1 80R26 v.1-3

The Royal Commission states, ***"We have found no evidence that disease afflicts individuals who breathe asbestos in the outdoor air or inhale it as occupants of asbestos-containing buildings."***

Coming out of the Royal Commission Report were the Regulations Respecting Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Buildings and Repair Operations Made Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, effective March 1986. See Acts on Index Table under "Occupational Health and Safety – Asbestos"

Additional information has been published recently, including the December, 1988 Summary of the Harvard University Symposium on Health Aspects of Exposure to Asbestos in Buildings.

From the most authoritative research available and based upon investigations to-date, it can be concluded that no significant health risk exists to the occupants of Hamilton Public Elementary and Secondary Schools.

*** Note** **The Royal Commission Report and other print materials have been compiled within the Dr. Harry Paikin Library (Education Centre, 100 Main Street West. Telephone 521-2518). These are available as reference materials for all interested members of the community.**

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